

Message Text

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PAGE 01 BEIRUT 03942 031600Z

62

ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 /026 W
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R 031523Z MAY 76
FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
TO AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM
INFO SECSTATE WASHDC 9870
AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMCONSUL ASMARA
AMEMBASSY JIDDA

C O N F I D E N T I A L BEIRUT 3942

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINS,
SUBJECT: CISCO 2 - REPORTED WITHDRAWAL BEIRUT RANSOM DEMAND

REF: KHARTOUM 1231

1. IN ANSWER TO QUESTION IN REFERENCE, THERE APPARENTLY WAS NO FORMAL PRESS RELEASE AS SUCH, BUT SIMPLY VARIOUS CONVERSATIONS IN WHICH OSMAN SABBE BACKERS IN BEIRUT TOLD LOCAL JOKALISTS THAT MUHAMMAD ALI IS NOW OUT AND HIS STATEMENTS ABOUT RANSOM ARE THEREFORE INOPERATIVE WHILE SABBE'S PREVIOUS STATEMENTS ABOUT UNCONDITIONAL RELEASE ARE STILL VALID.

2. LOCAL EMPLOYEE IN AP OFFICE REPORTS HIS BEST UNDERSTANDING FROM CONVERSATION IN WHICH HE PARTICIPATED IS THAT LAST WEEK OSMAN SABBE SENT MESSAGE FROM KHARTOUM SAYING MUHAMMAD ALI, WHO SEEMS TO HAVE HAD SUPPORT OF IRAQIS, HAS BEEN STRIPPED OF ALL AUTHORITY; THAT HIS PRONOUNCEMENTS CONCERNING RANSOM WERE ERRONEOUS; AND THAT IN FACT MUHAMMAD ALI KNOWS NOTHING ABOUT THE CAPTIVES, WHERE THEY ARE HELD OR PROSPECTS FOR THEIR RELEASE. NEW PEOPLE RESPONSIVE TO OSMAN SABBE NOW

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PAGE 02 BEIRUT 03942 031600Z

OCCUPY THE ERITREAN OFFICER HERE AND SAY THERE ARE NO

CHANGES IN ORIGINAL PLANS TO RELEASE CAPTIVES WITHOUT DEMANDING RANSOM. HOWEVER, IN CONVERSATION WITH OUR SOURCE, THEY INDICATED SOME NEGOTIATING WAS GOING ON VIA KHARTOUM GOVERNMENT AIMED AT U.S. ARMS SUPPLIES TO ETHIOPIAN REGIME. AP EMPLOYEE SAID HE FELT RE-EMERGENCE OF OSMAN SABBE WAS MADE POSSIBLE BY FORMATION OF NEW FRONT COMBINING FORMER RIVALS, AND CITED AS SIGNIFICANT DOCUMENTS INDICATING OSMAN SABBE NOW HAS BACKING OF A MOHAMMAD NASSAR.

3. OUR SOURCE HERE SEEMS ABLE ANSWER OFF TOP OF HIS HEAD ANY SPECIFIC QUESTIONS YOU SEND. HE OBVIOUSLY CHATS ON REGULAR BASIS WITH ERITREANS, AS APPARENTLY DO MANY NEWSMEN IN CITY. THEREFORE YOUR QUESTIONS PRESENT NO PROBLEM AT THIS END.
BROWN

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